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Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt & Jacques Hersh

The Zionists have now indeed done their best to create that insoluble 'tragic conflict' which can only be ended through cutting through the Gordian knot.

Hannah Arendt, "Zionism Reconsidered", in *Menorah*, 1945 (quoted by Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, Thousand Oaks, Ca., London, New Delhi: Sage, 1996, p.39.

When PLO intellectuals maintain that their movement is "the Zionism of the Palestinian people" they pay, unbeknownst to themselves, the ultimate compliment to this emulation of the West: isn't Zionism to them an alien, Western importation? Shlomo Avineri, "The Return to Islam" in *Dissent*, Fall, 1993.

The conflicting parties in the Middle East Peace Process have discovered that the aftermath of the Oslo accord did not bring about automatic and immediate harmony; and while peace became a buzzword, an end to the conflict is not yet in sight. Wide differences in fundamental claims and expectations divide the two contracting parties; thus even if the schedule outlined in the 1993 Israel-PLO Declaration is met, a permanent agreement has yet to be reached. The willingness of sleeping in the same bed has not yet led to the abandonment of the different dreams by the two parts. Israel aims at achieving security and stability and the Palestinian leadership needs support for a new state within a national entity. Adding to the difficulties of establishing legitimacy has been the tensions on the body politics of both camps released by the peace process itself. This is an element which both political elites who signed the agreement apparently underestimated.

Focusing on a comparative perspective of political cultures and changing national identities in Israel and the Occupied Territories in a rapidly transformed international environment, this present contribution offers a conflictual approach to comprehend the emerging new political identities in Israel and Palestine where new constellations between earlier opposed secular forces have been urged forward by the challenge from Islamic and Jewish fundamentalism.

While the discursive political culture of nationalism encompassed modernity and traditionalism, the split within each movement is a reflection of a dichotomy which is accentuated by the prospects of normality and its perceived menace to the identity of both peoples.

Thus in order to understand the evolution towards peace between the two secular nationalisms and the rejectionism within both camps it seems appropriate to apply a critical social approach involving a simultaneous focus on societal actors, the state and their interplay with the international context.

In our view, nationalism shows itself to be, just as religious fundamentalism, an ideological construct used/misused by political forces in the struggle for the "Holy Land".

The Conflict Between Two Ideologies of Nationalism and Secularism

As in many regions of the Third World, the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of Soviet-type socialism have profoundly affected the Middle East. On the geostrategic level the Palestinian cum Arab side has lost its former importance due to the disappearance of the Soviet presence and made the current peace negotiations possible. Israel, likewise, might in a longer perspective experience a loss of U.S. interest for this ally as a strategic asset in the area. Furthermore, both Israeli and Palestinian national identities and secular political cultures seem to push in the direction of accommodations against a perceived threat from fundamentalism. The outcome of this seemingless never ending peace process will perhaps lead to a genuine 'banalization' of Israel's internal as well as international identity and the inevitable emergence of a Palestinian state. In short, a normalization of inter-state affairs accomplished through a final agreement between Israel and Palestine followed by a permanent peace accord between Israel and its neighbours.

For the past fifty years, Jewish and Palestinian nationalisms have been competing ideological discourses fighting political, military, cultural and economic battles over a small territorial entity located in an Arab sea between Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. Besides the geopolitical implications of this conflict, interest for this region is also determined by the fact that the monotheist religions of Judaism, Islam and Christianity have their origins in this biblical land.

Although the two nationalisms originated under quite different circumstances, they both can nevertheless be conceptualized as offsprings of the European experience. While Jewish political nationalism originated within Europe as a reaction to anti-semitism, Palestinian nationalism had its roots in the anti-colonial struggle against British colonialism and European Jews' colonization.

Historically Zionism was thus conceived on the basis of Eurocentric ideals and its heritage was colonialism, progression and a urbanized settler civilization based on Westernization encompassing coherence in terms of societal force. The Jewish people, as it evolved during the

past 500 years, and the Zionist movement, as a political movement that led to the birth to Israel as a nation-state, are deeply interwoven with the histories and cultures of Europe. Zionism in its modern political expression has been successful in positioning itself as both victim and victor of the entire Jewish people. This is well encapsulated by Benedict Anderson: "The ancestor of the Warsaw uprising is the state of Israel."¹ In this relation, it is undeniable that post-World War II Zionism and the political entity of Israel monopolized the Holocaust experience to serve its project not only by mobilizing survivors but also to achieve world sympathy for its own actions. As Zygmunt Bauman writes:

The Jewish state tried to employ the tragic memories as the certificate of its political legitimacy, a safe-conduct pass for its part and future policies, and above all as the advance payment for the injustices it might itself commit.²

The other nationalism i.e. "Palestinianism", could not - because of various internal as well as external reasons - materialize before it was too late; the rise of mass-nationalism was created and shaped as an encounter with Europe and invented as a response to the Zionist conquest of territory;³ during the 1960s and 1970s Palestinian identity was revived in connection with the rise of two other competing Arab nationalist movements: on the one hand Nasserism with its idea of Panarabism, and on the other hand a compartmentalized Arab nation consisting of many nationalisms without any single unifying element other than Islam and the Arab language. "Palestinianism" became a janus-faced ideology trying to walk a fine line between Third World rethorics about armed struggle, liberation and progress and an inherent bias towards traditionalism, a rural world-view of patriarchal family and political structures as well as having to respond to actions and facts that seemed more or less irreversible.

Attempting to understand the origins and the evolutions of both nationalisms does not resolve the question of territoriality. From a legalistic viewpoint, the legitimacy of Zionism's claim to Palestine was not very strong. Scattered throughout the world for several millennia, Jews never ceased to identify on the basis of their religion; that is to say as a special people distinct from the various brands of non-believers among whom they lived. Nevertheless, as professor Shlomo Avineri told an Israeli audience at a meeting on Jewish identity, there has not been a Jewish entity since the destruction of the temple. "In the past two hundred years, the discussion has to a large degree revolved around the problem of 'who is a Jew'. And there has not been any 'official position' on this question. Zionism didn't have a stance on this, but took a territorial point of departure and on this basis projected to give Jews a 'face' to the world."⁴

At no historical stage, at least since the return from Babylonian captivity, has there been a serious claim for a Hebrew political entity among the twelve tribes. According to the teachings of Judaism if such a state was to come about, this would be through an act of God with the arrival of the Messiah to deliver the people from their sufferings. Not until the very end of the nineteenth century, did European Jewry - influenced by and rejected by newfangled Western nationalism - raise the banner of political nationalism and the demand for a national Jewish homeland. The project aimed to transform the Jews from an inter-national nation, a non-nation⁵ into a Jewish national entity.

Seen in this light it is an encroachment on international norms to identify the Jewish links to the ancestral land of Israel on the merit deriving from pilgrimages there, or the hope of return based on the arrival of the Messiah with the desire to gather all Jews into a modern territorial state situated in the ancient Holy Land i.e., - a territory with a non-Jewish majority. One might as well argue that good Muslims, whose highest ambition is to make the pilgrimage to Mecca could have a legitimate claim to declare themselves citizens of what is now Saudi Arabia.⁶ Leading Zionists, aware of the weakness of their case, were willing to accept the offer of creating a Jewish homeland in Argentina or Uganda! For some of them the territory was primordial while geographical location was of lesser import.

On the plan of political ideology, the two nationalisms share a number of significant affinities. The most important of which is the nearly symbiotic nature of ethnic origin - semitism, another is religious monotheism found in Judaism and Islam. Secularization has only had seminal success in the two experiences where a break with the importance played by religious practice and its influence in daily life as well as in political attitudes has not been consumed. Taking the symbiotic twinfactor into consideration, it is not surprising that secular forces in the Palestinian and Israeli political spheres share a common interest in containing the fundamentalist and anti-modernist forces in Israel/Palestine opposing the peace process.

Unequal Partners in the Quest for Peace

Until the recent past the battle between Zionism and "Palestinianism" was affected by the external support each could mobilize. The alignment of the United States behind Israel, while still nurturing a positive relationship to conservative Arab regimes, was to the detriment of the Palestinian cause. Israel has had almost unlimited economic and diplomatic as well as military backing from the United States without loosing the initiative. The activities and influence of the Jewish lobby in Washington worked in a manner to prevent the relationship from developing into a patron-client pattern. As far as the Palestinian nationalist movement is concerned, it had to 'rely'

on non-trustworthy friends, i.e. the former Soviet Union and its satellites and competing Arab nationalist interests in the Middle East geopolitical sphere. The support of the world's most powerful nations for their regional allies made the so-called conflict between the Arab countries and Israel appear almost like an "imaginary war". Moreover, taking Israel's possession of nuclear weapons into consideration gives a more sober meaning to the term conflict.

As Duncan Clarke recently noted: "Indeed, Israel's welfare, even survival, is dependent on its special relationship with Washington."⁷ Moreover, as a state whose economic and political well-being depends to an enormous degree on Western and especially American support - almost 25 percent of Israel's GNP today takes the form of American aid, which since 1967 has totaled the staggering figure of 77 billion dollars - we are entitled to draw the conclusion that Israel's occupation policies on the West Bank and Gaza have in fact been subsidized by the West.⁸ This imbalance led to the following comment by an American commentator: "No nation has ever invested more heavily in the security and economic prosperity of another than has the United States in Israel."⁹

This state of affairs plus the backing of the Jewish-American community has of course given Israeli politics its specificity both with regard to internal and external matters. Thus, as stated by an Israeli scholar, Israel is "afflicted with an 'elite illegalism' that is central to the country's domestic political culture and international behavior. Sustained partly by a pervasive security consciousness and born of genuine fears and the absence of a written constitution, elite illegalism deprecates the idea of the rule of law and assumes that 'democracy can work without a strict adherence to ... law'."¹⁰ Israel represents a unique hybrid, combining democracy, with a system in which virtually everything is considered "political," but also extremely centralized, with little diffusion of power and few checks and balances. Although belonging to the Western camp of liberal capitalism, "Israeli commercial policy is the most protectionist in the democratic world. Israel has always had high tariff walls accompanied by even higher non-tariff barriers."¹¹ The state owns dozens of industries including most of the energy companies, much manufacturing, all utilities, all public broadcasting, all the universities and academic research institutions, 93 percent of the country's land, and virtually all of the country's water supply. In 1992, the state also held most of the stocks in four out of the country's five major banks, including the two largest. Since 1948 the aim of Israeli economic policy has been to maximize political control, or at least political involvement, in every part of the economy.¹²

In addition, external inputs - in the form of US aid and access to surplus Arab labor - have had an internal impact on the much vaunted and specific type of state capitalist social structure of

accumulation. However, this dependency has had disruptive consequences leading to social stratification and polarization. As the writer A.B. Yeshohua, who was awarded the 1995 Israel Prize for literature, sees it, the domestic social cohesion suffered from both access to the exploitation of Palestinians as well as the inflow of dollars:

Over the course of the last twenty years, Israeli society, which originally could boast of minor socio-economic differences and a sound social constitution, has become a country whose social gaps are progressively widening. Because of corruption bred by the employment of cheap Palestinian labor and accelerated economic development generated by American financial support, inequality in our society is on the rise. In fact, today Israel can be found in fairly poor standing among western democratic countries on the issue of class polarization.¹³

This view is reaffirmed by Rabbi Michael Melchior, who was born and raised in Denmark. Addressing the above mentioned political meeting he lamented: "We have lost our social consciousness: Israel is today one of the worlds most capitalist countries, where the gap between rich and poor is twice as large as in Scandinavia."¹⁴

On the other hand, it is quite obvious that an eventual economic relationship between Israel and the emerging Palestinian political entity under the best of circumstances cannot be based on equality between Ismail and Isak, but rather on unequal dependency in the mold of a David and Goliath relationship.¹⁵ Approximately 90 percent of imports into the Palestinian territories come from Israel and between 70 and 80 percent of exports goes to Israel. About a quarter of the population of the autonomous areas is supported by family members who work in Israel; however, these workers do not always have the necessary permits to enter Israel, since it is difficult to obtain them from the Israeli authorities. Airports, seaports, and other transit facilities are all under Israeli control.¹⁶

The source of the economic inequality and unevenness is to be found in the ideology of nation-building of a Jewish state that very early came to dominate progressive Zionism, which according to the French- Israeli historian Zeev Sternhell, had its origin in contemporary movements in Europe. In his terms "constructive socialism (labor) was nothing else than European national socialism." Its ideology aimed at becoming the exclusive solution in replacing liberalism and marxism. As Sternhell puts it:

It is an ideology which considers the nation as a historical, cultural or biological entity. In order to preserve its future prospect and to protect itself from forces

which undermine its harmony, the nation must strengthen its internal unity at the same time as motivate all components to the common mission.¹⁷

Thus, while the socialism of the Zionist served to mobilize aspirations of secular Jews in the Diaspora, in practice, by putting the highest priority on nation-building and ignoring class politics, the result was the creation of state corporatist capitalism.

With regard to Palestinians, labor Zionism very early implemented colonial exclusion and subordination. Consequently, regardless of its working-class origins and socialist ideological remnants, Zionism was not interested in a partnership with the indigenous Palestinian workforce. The nation-building of a Jewish state won over any universalist concern. Thus, the national and colonial aims of Zionism came to the fore through the creation of exclusively Jewish labor unions and acquisition of Arab land. Furthermore, in this endeavor of modernization, concepts of nationality and citizenship were formulated barring Arabs because of their alleged social and technological backwardness and the supposed lack of a coherent national culture.¹⁸

What Israel has been doing to Palestinians is done against a background of long-standing Western tutelage over Palestine and the Arab World but also against a legacy of equally long-standing and equally unflattering anti-Semitism that, in this century, produced the Holocaust. The West cannot fail to connect the horrific history of anti-Semitic massacres to the establishment of a Jewish political identity; nor can the West fail to understand the depth, the extent and the overwhelming experience of suffering and despair that informed the post-World War II Zionist movement. But it is no less appropriate for Europeans and Americans today, who support Israel because of the wrongs committed against the Jews, to realize that backing for Israel has included, and still includes, support for perpetrator of the exile and dispossession of the Palestinian people.¹⁹

According to Edward Said, Palestinians have since 1948 been the victims of the victims, and are kept in this position to a great extent by Europe and the United States, both of whom look away and excuse Israeli behavior because the Hebrew state still is seen as a nation of survivors.

Islamists as Modernisers

While Judaism and Zionism have found favor in the European cultural and political spheres, Eurocentrism has always had difficulties in interpreting Islam as well as Arab nationalism.

A large number of Western scholars tend to regard Islam as a pre-modern force. However the most important pressures for political reform emanate from the myriad of Islamist movements that have emerged during the past two decades. As Augustus Richard Norton remarks:

It is a commonplace that the growth of Islamist movements is a reflection of Islam's inherent appeal over secular ideologies, which are often derided as alien and failed. There is some truth to this, but equally important, the Islamists have adopted a strategy of power seeking and have combined this strategy with a penetrating critique of government performance. The populist Islamist movements have tapped into a wellspring of discontent; they have not resumed the natural march of Muslim history, of course, the failure of government to implement sharia (Islamic law) is often cited as part of the Islamists' critique, but central to that critique is the emphasis on corruption, malfeasance, and misbehavior. The mistreatment of people at the hands of government is a constant refrain. The Islamist critique is persuasive because it rings so true.²⁰

Misunderstanding of the resurgence of religious movements in the Muslim world is based on an over-emphasis of the violent anti-Westernism discourse and antagonism towards pro-Western elements in their own societies. In this connection it ought to be recalled that it was the American CIA who recruited and trained "freedom" fighters among fundamentalist movements in Arab countries to fight in Afghanistan against the atheist Soviet troops! Nor should it be forgotten that Hamas was initially encouraged by the Israeli security apparatus in the occupied territories as a way of weakening the PLO. In addition, the popular support which fundamentalist organizations get is often based on philanthropical activities of organizing and helping the poor confronted with the inability of the modernizing state to fulfill a social function. This has also been the case in the Palestinian territories after the PLO lost the funding of Saudi Arabia following Yassir Arafat's support for the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

The problematical differentiation between secularism and religious manifestations and political change misses the encompassing worldview of Islamic opposition. "Western scholars, often striking a tone that might be confused with apologia, have argued for the complementarity of Islamic concepts like consultation and consensus with democratic procedures. These analyses have missed the point; the crucial thinking among Islamists these days deals with questions of tolerance or civility, minority rights, and confidence and security."²¹ What is most important to understand is that political groupings like Hamas are much more than just opposition groups: Hamas is a sentiment; it is an index of Palestinian frustration, just like the FIS in Algeria, and the Islamic movement in Iran led by Ayatollah Khomeini before them. In later years, the existence of Jewish fundamentalism in opposition to both the secularization of Israeli society and the peace

process has also been revealed. Its clearest expression was of course the recent murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

The dilemma for secular forces in the area resides in coopting religious activists in both camps. If secular forces fail in this attempt, the new religious militants among Jews as well as Islamists might transform traditional rituals such as praying and fast into militant actions. The surprising element in Middle East politics has been the upsurge of Jewish residual traditionalism and religious fanaticism in what was considered to be a secular and Western-type democracy. The idea of a return to Middle Age politics - a Clash of Civilizations - where politics is defined by the cultural struggle between those who want Israel to become a Western-like state and those who insist on Jewish identity is a poor substitute to replace the old cliché about communism as the enemy, while the real question is a matter of solving the conflict by recognizing equal rights to each contracting party.

In the present context of the so-called peace process what we have witnessed is a religious dimension of the conflict which was previously subsumed under the rhetoric of both Israeli and Palestinian nationalisms.²² This resurgence of the conflict's religious nature is at the same time a revolt against the process of globalization which is seen as threatening the cultural identities of the two sides. Paradoxically, this attitude translates into antagonism against the peace process. In Israeli politics, the religious vote made the victory of Benjamin Netanyahu at the last election possible. While the previous government on the basis of the Oslo negotiations offered a vision of a New Middle East, which could be integrated into the global market, might have appealed to secular Israelis, Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox together with various extremist right-wing nationalist political blocs, prefer the ghetto to the global village. As the philosopher at the Shalom Hartman Institute and Hebrew University, Moshe Halbertal, put it "for Orthodox Jews the peace process became synonymous with a loss of Jewish identity."²³

This is a mirror-reflection of what has been experienced in Arab societies confronted with the failures of secular modernization. As Shlomo Avineri put it:

The tragedy of the Arab world has been that over the last decades Arab societies have tried every variety of Western political ideology - monarchical constitutionalism, republicanism, varieties of Marxism and socialism, whiffs of fascism, "Third World" radicalism - and all have failed to heal Arab societies.²⁴

The Political Agenda of the Occupied Territories

Just like the confrontation between Zionism and "Palestinianism" has revolved around the question of land, the key to peace is likewise connected to how to defuse the problem. Israel has for some time been trying to establish a political culture unbound from the discourse about the territories. The centrality of territory was crucial to the Zionist project from the very beginning. However, as a result of the long-drawn conflict and external pressures (regional as well as international) the importance of land relative to peace lost its appeal for a larger proportion of Israelis. A similar evolution seems somewhat to have taken place in the Palestinian camp with only the demand for East Jerusalem as a minimal precondition. For the Israeli side, the threat to the approach of delinking territory from the project of creating biblical Eretz Israel evolves around fundamentalism; and there is no doubt that religious energy can be terribly dangerous. This creates an internal problem: "Israel's dilemma is not whether deals with Syria or the Palestinians are worth the risk, but how to be Israel without the issue of the land."²⁵

It is the sensitivity surrounding this problem that has affected the lack of decisiveness on the part of the political class. This is especially the case as the issue of security has also been tied to territory. Consequently, the advertised peace process cannot be isolated from these considerations. Uri Avneri has remarked that "the question is not whether the Oslo agreement is good or bad - but rather whether the implementation is progressing well and in good faith, and where it leads."²⁶ Also on the other side there are a number of Palestinian agendas which must be resolved before real peace can be accepted and final implementation achieved. One concerns the Diaspora Palestinians who feel that the Israeli-PLO agreement ignores their concerns (primarily their right to return to their homeland within the pre-1967 borders; likewise a not insignificant number claims a right to compensation for loss of their properties in pre-1948 Israel); another is that of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, whose overriding priority is to rid themselves of all vestiges of Israeli occupation; a third is the status of Jerusalem; and a fourth is the obvious question of establishing the Palestinian state.

However the most important obstacle to peace comes from rejectionists on both sides: among the Palestinians there are three groups which object to the peace agreement: radical rejectionists i.e. secular left-wing organizations such as George Habbash's PFLP who doesn't want to give up the momentum of the uprising/Intifada; then there are the Yassir Arafat supporters who feel that their leader has gone too far in alienating many people, and finally the disenchanted members within Fatah who criticize their leader-sometimes in public; according to Muhammad Musli these groups are, in contrast to Islamic fundamentalist forces, united in their calls for democratization. Six principal ideas govern their position:

- The PLO executive committee, its chairman (Yassir Arafat), its central council, and its bureaucracy should not be arbitrarily superimposed on the Palestine Authority (PA), or on the limited local self-government the Palestinians have been allowed to establish as an interim measure under the Israeli-PLO agreement.
- The pro-democracy political culture embraced by the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza must replace the autocracy and paternalism of Yassir Arafat and the Tunis-based Palestinian leadership.
- The institutions created or about to be created by Yassir Arafat should protect human rights and individual liberties, and should be staffed on the basis of merit and not patronage.
- The political field should be open to every Palestinian. A constitution drafted by delegates elected specifically for the purpose should have primacy over the concerns and interests of entrenched elites.
- All authority should flow from the people and should be exercised by elected bodies. This is the only way to assure the creation of government and leadership style suited to nation-building.
- Yassir Arafat should take orders from one master - the Palestinian people - and not from the Israeli or any other party or quarter.²⁷

But as long as these fundamental agendas and demands have not been met, the peace agreement cannot be implemented. Yassir Arafat's PA is caught as hostage to Israel in a number of ways. At the security level, the PA is expected to succeed where Israel's military and intelligence services failed, in curtailing and quelling the Islamic groups and the secular opposition. "Every move, every remark Yassir Arafat makes is microscopically scrutinized by Israel. Worse, Yassir Arafat constantly has to prove to Israel that he is credible and trustworthy."²⁸

In contrast to these secular political demands on the peace process, the religious opposition is of a more fundamental nature:

The Palestinian Islamic movement is not anti-peace *per se*. Rather its vision of an environment of peace is radically different from the goal which the Fatah

leadership and government of Israel currently aspire to. The Islamicist trend in Palestine aspires to an environment of peace that is Islamic, not secular in nature. They strive, struggle (wage Jihad) to resurrect or create an Islamic way of life that encompasses not just the realm of religious practice but the political, economic and social order.²⁹

It is of course an irony of history that it was in fact the Intifada in the occupied territories which made the price of continued Israeli occupation politically prohibitive for both the government of Israel as well as the PLO-leadership. Islamic militancy thus contributed to bringing the two parts together in an agreement to attempt to resolve the conflict in Gaza and the West Bank.

The fundamental question for the PA, as well as for Israel, concerns the choice between inclusion or exclusion of oppositional forces to the peace process. If Fatah/PA excludes Hamas and other rejectionists, it might lead to a Palestinian civil war. If Israel cannot accommodate its rejectionists among the fundamentalists, Likud party's supporters and essentially the Oriental Jews, no peace settlement will be implemented in the near future.³⁰ The *Kulturkampf* within Israeli society finds its expression in attitudes toward the peace process.

Conclusion: Changing Political Cultures and Nationalist Expectations

While the Jewish political movement in the form of Zionism succeeded in establishing the national entity of Israel, it has constantly striven to prevent Palestinian nationalism from achieving the goal of creating a Palestinian state. As such it would be ahistorical to ascribe the difficulties behind the peace process entirely to the fundamentalist fringes in either camps. Both secular nationalist movements presently have leaderships who, taking internal, regional and international constellations into consideration, reached the conclusion at Oslo that the time was ripe for concessions and compromises. The Israeli labour government, supported by a significant segment of the population, decided to share the same bed as the PLO-leadership, which was also favored by a war-tired Palestinian population in the occupied territories. But the question is whether the two nationalisms have abandoned the dreams for which they fought and whether this would be legitimated by popular support.

The peace accord of Oslo I and Oslo II has set a process in motion whereby Israel is willing to see a nebulous Palestinian entity comprising, with the exception of Jerusalem, the cities of the occupied territories while itself retaining control of the countryside where the implanted Jewish colonies would have access to the resources (land+water). It is not uninteresting to note that the geography of the map of Oslo II is quite similar to the proposal of "cantonization" of the occupied territories worked out by the former hawkish defence minister, Ariel Sharon.³¹ As a matter of

fact, Israel has since 1993 intensified infrastructural projects whereby a highway network would permit transportation to and from these Jewish settlements without coming in contact with Palestinian villages and towns. Notwithstanding the affront to Palestinian nationalism, Jewish rejectionism in both Israel and the United States is nevertheless violently opposed to the process.

When Israel formally transferred to the PA responsibility for education and culture, health, social welfare, direct taxation, and tourism, some observers saw this as evidence of emerging, albeit hybrid, state structures. Taking further into consideration the combined facts that, the PLO transferred its political state-type infrastructure from Tunis to Gaza and Jericho, and the leadership of the Intifada (UNLU) had been building a sophisticated social infrastructure and a number of political institutions, the emergence of a new state seemed almost irreversible. Obviously, the state already exists, in part because its success in achieving international recognition does not depend on a commensurate ability to defend and control territory. External powers might come to the conclusion that there is little difference between autonomy and nominal sovereignty once the structure of the final peace settlement is put into place. "As importantly, the state will build on Palestinian nation-building since 1948 and on the consolidation of a new political system and social alliances in Gaza and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) under the PA."³²

An alternative scenario for realizing the Palestinian Utopia of a national entity might be through the emerging Israeli insistence on mutual "separation" - a peaceful apartheid - consisting of sniffer dogs, border fence, guards and electronic surveillance, indeed a physical border between the Territories and Green line Israel.³³ To be sure Israel is still able to "cantonize" the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but as the acceptance of the conflict for nearly fifty years by external powers, this option will also have to be "encouraged" by external powers. As seen in the Arab world Israel was created by the West, now it is time for the West to help create a new Palestine. As long as American support was unequivocal, official Israel didn't show much interest for a peaceful resolution. As the commentator, William Pfaff, notes: "The Rabin and Peres governments were agonizingly slow in negotiating Palestinian autonomy, as if the process itself guaranteed peace by satisfying Washington."³⁴

In the Palestinian camp, although Yassir Arafat's leadership seems to have stabilized and pacified the opposition (both secular and fundamentalist), it has been weakened as a result of the hardships the population has been submitted to since the Intifada. Under these conditions the prospects are limited. Within the pro-peace forces among Palestinians, concern is mounting about the viability of an autonomous entity without access to the resources of land and water. On the other hand, the

official Palestinian media have launched the example of Singapore as a city-state who has been able to survive on the basis of its human capital. With the same population but with less than half the territory which Oslo II grants the Palestinians, the small entity of Southeast Asia is seen as a success story because of its remarkable performances within high-tech industries.³⁵ Can technology and capital fulfill the aspirations of Palestinian nationalism? This question depends not only on the ability of the PLO to establish a strong developmental state, but also on Israel as well as the Arab nations in the region, transnational investment, technology transfers, and not least market access. A precondition to such an evolution has to be the reduction of the economic discrepancy between Israelis and Palestinians which can become the greatest threat to peace.³⁶

While some forces within the Palestinian nationalist movement seem to pit their aspiration on becoming a high-tech capitalist island in the Arab world, politicians within Israel's Labor Party - especially around former Prime Minister Shimon Perez - look to the creation of some form of Middle East Free Trade Area. Aware that globalization of the world economy is simultaneously stimulating economic and political regionalism, the future of Israel might be better served by surmounting the limitations of Jewish nationalism and becoming an integral part of the Middle East. It has been estimated officially that the Arab boycott preventing Asian and European companies from dealing with Israel has cost its economy about \$ 400 million a year in more costly imports, lost exports and other lost business opportunities.³⁷ After all it is questionable how long the dependency on American economic and political support can go on.

If the above arguments are valid, then what we are observing is the attempted trade-off of two nationalist political movements towards economic projects in order to become "normal" societies. However, a precondition is achieving political legitimacy for such a process in each camp. But as it now stands, it is still uncertain whether these scenarios will be viable as so many variables will have to be controlled.

Notes:

1. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and the Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991, p.205.
2. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Cambridge (UK): Polity Press, 1993, p. ix.
3. See among others Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp.138 and 152.
4. Quoted by Hanne Foighel: 'Til det sekulære Israel', *Udsyn*, No. 1, March 1996, p. 4 (our translation).
5. Bauman, op.cit., p.52.

6. Hobsbawm, op.cit., pp.47-48.
7. Duncan Clarke, 'Israel's Unauthorized Arms Transfers', *Foreign Policy* No. 99, Summer 1995, p.89.
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